

## **Higher Education Task Force to Look at Affordability, Access**

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Oct. 21, 2008) – Proclaiming that no child of ability should be denied access to college because of cost, Gov. Steve Beshear today named a 25-member task force to tackle the tough issues of affordability and access to Kentucky higher education.

“It’s my belief that no person in this state with the drive and ability to succeed should be denied access to a college education because he or she can’t afford it,” Gov. Beshear said. “Yet because of cost, the door of opportunity is closed or beyond reach for too many of our children.”

Gov. Beshear said the College Access Work Group will be co-chaired by business leaders Mira Ball of Lexington and Pete Mahurin of Bowling Green. Other members will include business leaders, senior governmental officials and members from both houses of the state legislature. University presidents from across the state will advise the work group.

The group will be tasked with producing two reports with recommendations for Gov. Beshear.

The first, due in January 2009, will among other things look at ways to reduce costs associated with college.

Gov. Beshear said he wanted ideas that were both bold and practical. “Any recommendations for short-term action must recognize the budgetary constraints that we find ourselves in today. We can make some important steps in the short term, but they must be feasible.”

The second report, due by September 2009, will take broader look at the long-term issue of how best to create stable state funding for public higher education. The discussion will include whether smaller tuition increases could be proposed in exchange for certain funding levels and meeting performance objectives.

“Year to year we have not been consistent in delivering the support needed,” he said. “A new roadmap must realistically consider the difficult budget circumstances we are in, but it must also create consistency, coherence and stability.”

Beshear said improving affordability and access are important because more Kentuckians in higher education is the chief factor in building a highly skilled and educated work force. Only 17 percent of Kentuckians have bachelor’s degrees. The

national average, though, is nearly 25 percent. By 2020, the national average is projected to be 32 percent.

The governor cited four major areas of concern that the work group will address in its reports:

- Making college more affordable. Residential tuition has increased by 10 percent a year over the last 10 years, compared to 7 percent in surrounding states.
- Making financial aid more accessible and easier to understand.
- Easing barriers to transfer from community and technical colleges to four-year institutions and graduate school. In 2006-2007, nearly 4,500 students transferred from a community or technical college to a four-year university. Although an increase over previous years, to meet goals the state has for 2020, 11,000 more transfers will be needed by that time.
- Determining appropriate levels of state support for higher education and outlining more clearly performance expectations for colleges and universities.

“We can’t be content with baby steps when other places are taking giant strides, not when we’re trying to compete with these states in the global marketplace,” Gov. Beshear said. “Rather, we must pursue new solutions to old challenges. We need dramatic and focused strategies that lead to transformational and enduring change. Today, in the critical area of building tomorrow’s workforce, we begin our important work.”

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